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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [AMGT](#) [ECON](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: GENERAL STRIKE LOOMS FEBRUARY 4 AS UNIONS RALLY
BEHIND PRIVATIZED TOBACCO WORKERS

REF: 09 ANKARA 1829

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. A deadlock in negotiations between the GOT and the Turk-Is Labor Confederation, affiliated with former TEKEL workers (REFTEL), has produced a call for a one-day work stoppage on February 4. Turk-Is, supported by five other labor confederations, is confident that the strike will have a broad impact and is determined to continue its struggle to get better conditions for the former TEKEL workers. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Several Turkish labor confederations have decided to stop work for one day on Thursday, February 4 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to protest a deadlock in the talks between the government and Turk-Is Labor Confederation regarding the fate of former state monopoly (TEKEL) workers. The workers have been protesting resolutely for 49 days, and the Prime Minister instructed his ministers to resolve the issue after meeting in person with the Confederation on January 28.

13. (U) On February 1 Turk-Is Labor Confederation President Mustafa Kumlu -- who had met with PM Erdogan -- sat down with State Minister Hayati Yazici, Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek and Minister of Labor and Social Security Omer Dincer twice at the Prime Ministry to talk about the former TEKEL workers. Kumlu listed the demands of the former TEKEL workers. The ministers took those demands to a cabinet meeting. Then Kumlu and the ministers met again, after which Kumlu told the press that the government's proposals would not meet the workers' demands.

14. (U) According to press reports, the government proposed to increase the salaries of the former TEKEL workers to between 770 and 940 lira per month within the context of 4C status (REFTEL); to provide them 22 days of leave without pay; to provide them something resembling a severance payment; and to provide employment to workers in public institutions in their sector including in facilities in neighboring provinces under 4C status. However, the Turk-Is Confederation reportedly insists that the former TEKEL workers to be transferred to other institutions working within the context of Labor Law Number 4857 (which would include job security and other benefits); and for the workers not to be converted to the

category of "4C" workers.

15. (U) After negotiations broke down, Ministers Yazici, Simsek and Dincer held a joint press conference. Yazici said that they had studied the issue from the legal and financial aspects and concluded that the most fair and correct way to employ the former TEKEL workers is under 4C. He said: "we increased their salaries 25-30 percent, and increased their annual leave to 22 days. We suggested they to be employed at the public institutions where they are currently assigned to and at neighboring provinces. They did not accept." Yazici warned the former TEKEL workers and their families that they have one month to apply to receive 4C status. Prime Minister Erdogan, at his party's parliamentary group meeting today, reiterated Yazici's message and added that the actions of the former TEKEL workers had gone beyond their initial purpose and now appeared to an anti-government campaign.

16. (U) After the ministers' announcement, Turk-Is President Kumlu convened the Presidents of six labor and public employees confederations including Hak-Is, DISK, Memur-Sen, KAMU-Sen and KESK to discuss their response. On February 2, they announced a joint decision for the general strike February 4. In addition to the work stoppage, the former TEKEL workers protesting in Ankara will begin a hunger strike.

17. (SBU) Turk-Is Press Spokesperson Sevkutan Nevsuhan told us that all organized labor, including private sector and public sector workers will be called to participate in the work stoppage. She noted that it is not yet known what the rate

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of participation will be, and that the groups will meet on February 5 to assess the strike and to decide their next steps. A KESK legal expert also said that they have been preparing for a work stoppage for the past two weeks, and their members will participate in every sector where they are represented. He noted that the anti-democratic practices of the AKP Government, combined with the pressures and the suffering of TEKEL workers, have led to a public reaction against the government. He contended the Government is hostile to the labor sector because it fears that if it gives in to the former TEKEL workers, it would set a bad precedent for future privatizations of public sector institutions. We also learned from Hak-Is International Relations Officer Osman Yildiz that Hak-Is has opted to participate in the work stoppage, but will decide later on the extent of participation. (Note: Among the confederations, Hak-Is is in the most difficult position since it is viewed as more sympathetic to the government. End Note)

18. (SBU) COMMENT. This strike will add to increasing friction between the government and the organized labor. While the GOT does not want to concede to the former TEKEL workers for principally economic reasons, organized labor is using the recent spate of failed labor negotiations to its advantage, turning up the volume on its requests for rights for public sector workers and the workers of privatized companies. In the prelude to general elections in 2011, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) will not welcome the image that it lacks sufficient sympathy for workers, many of whom were probably AKP voters. Both sides will continue testing the limits of their power. In the end, it is likely the GOT will agree to reform the labor laws to meet some demands, while the unions and confederations will agree to some less-than-ideal tradeoffs so that their members can stay employed.
Jeffrey

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